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## Mississippi's School Problem

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# MISSISSIPPI'S SCHOOL PROBLEM

## Twenty-Three Questions and Answers

1. Q. Will the amendment, if adopted, abolish the public schools of Mississippi?
  - A. No. The voters are not asked to vote December 21st on the abolition of the public schools. So far as known no one presently favors such a course.
2. Q. What are the purposes of the amendment?
  - A. 1. To enable the Legislature to continue authorizing the establishment, support, maintenance and operation of the public schools of this state. In view of the conflict between the provisions of the Constitution of Mississippi relative to segregated schools and the recent decision of the United States Supreme Court, it is doubtful that the Legislature can make any appropriation for the public schools or enact other legislation without violating the provisions of the Constitution of this state or the May 17th decision of the U. S. Supreme Court. This conflict will continue until the U. S. Supreme Court rules on the constitutionality of Section 207 of the Mississippi Constitution which is the section that specifically provides that separate schools for the races shall be maintained.
  2. To confer upon the Legislature the power to abolish the public schools by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting. By a majority vote of the Legislature, counties and school districts may be authorized to abolish their public schools. Legislators have pointed out that such a course may become necessary at some future date in order to provide financial assistance for all educable children. The public schools would be abolished only as a last resort, to prevent integration.
3. Q. Recourse to what measures for the maintenance of segregation will probably be used before a legislative vote on abolition?
  - A. 1. Continuance of segregation under Section 207 of the Mississippi Constitution.
  2. The assignment of pupils.
  3. Gerrymandering of school districts.
  4. Application of military or police power.
  5. Other applicable statutes.
  6. New statutes.
4. Q. How many years would be required to exhaust all the methods of approach in question three?
  - A. An estimated 10 to 20 years, probably longer. It is hoped that by that time a permanent solution will have been found.
5. Q. Why not wait ten or twenty years or until all other methods of preserving segregation have failed before conferring upon the Legislature the power to abolish the public schools?
  - A. 1. Adoption of the amendment December 21st will serve notice that the people of Mississippi mean to maintain segregation at all cost. Negro leaders participated in the formation (through the Mississippi Citizens' Council on Education) of the present school program often described as the finest in the history of Mississippi. While a large number of Negro leaders have since repudiated the separate but equal philosophy of school operation, it is believed that, by and large, Negroes want equal advantages for their children under a segregated tax-supported plan.
  2. It will be a warning to alien organizations that we intend to preserve our way of life.
  3. Conceivably, it would crystalize public opinion in some states to a point where it would probably result in a more liberal high court interpretation of its May 17th decision.
  4. It will have some weight in the preparation, adoption and promotion of the platforms of political parties.
  5. Passage of the amendment will provide the best possible assurance of a continued and improved segregated public school system to the citizens who are being called upon to pay for a \$120,000,000.00 school building program.



6. Q. What are the main provisions of the Mississippi Constitution relating to public schools?
- A. 1. A uniform system of free public schools by taxation or otherwise for all children 6 to 21 years of age. (Article 8, Section 201).  
2. It guarantees at least four month's school term. (Article 8, Section 205).  
3. Separate schools shall be maintained for children of the white and colored races. (Article 8, Section 207).
7. Q. What constitutional provisions guarantee a continuation of the present system of public schools?
- A. As a practical matter, by failing to provide revenue, 2/5 plus one of the Senators or House members present and voting could nullify the present school program. By refusal to vote for school appropriations, 25 Senators or 71 House members could sound the "death knell" to schools.
8. Q. What is the outlook for public schools in the event the amendment is passed December 21st?
- A. Favorable. Legislative leaders have committed themselves to continue segregated tax-supported schools through the minimum education plan and the inauguration of a school building program. A special session designed to accomplish these purposes is tentatively scheduled for January, 1955.
9. Q. Is the May 17th decision in keeping with the American way of life?
- A. No. The U. S. Supreme Court's action is an "interference in states rights." It is legislation by decree instead of through Congress. In the May 17, 1954 decision, the U. S. Supreme Court overruled at least 5 of its own previous decisions, 13 decisions of lower courts, and 59 decisions of State Supreme Courts. Its decision was not based on a single precedent of previous decisions. The decision struck down the Constitutions of 17 states relative to separate schools for the races and further struck down the statutes of 21 states. The decision of the high court was based on 7 works in the fields of sociology and psychology.
10. Q. Is there a satisfactory plan for separate schools?
- A. Yes. The answer to the racial problem is a continuance of segregated tax-supported schools through increased support for the minimum foundation program and the immediate inauguration of a building program.
11. Q. Does the Legislature have sufficient authority to deal with public school segregation?
- A. No, not as the Constitution is presently written. Adoption of the amendment December 21st is necessary to give the Legislature flexibility to meet whatever situation may arise.
12. Q. Has a workable plan for private schools been offered?
- A. No. A good "quarterback" cannot name the play he will use in a game ten years hence. Many educational, political and legal leaders think the details of the "private school" program must be worked out, if and when needed, in the light of conditions at that time - including intervening Supreme Court decisions.
13. Q. Isn't it asking a great deal of the proponents of a strong public school system to vote to authorize the Legislature to abolish this system which has been more than 100 years in the making?
- A. Yes AND No! No one is voting to abolish the public schools! Some term the December 21 vote as a vote of confidence and faith in our ability to solve our problem if and when all other measures have failed. WE MUST HAVE FAITH.



14. Q. Since integration has been taking place on the college level for many years, does it follow that there will be integration on the elementary and high school levels?
- A. No. Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina have not admitted Negroes to white colleges on any level.
15. Q. Is there any guarantee that the Court will uphold a system of private schools?
- A. No one can predict a Court decision. The establishment of a system of private schools would tend to invalidate the effect of enforced racial integration.
16. Q. If the public schools should be abolished, would not the poorer counties and school districts suffer a much greater loss than the richer political subdivisions.
- A. No. Better school practices throughout the country require that the "money follow the child." This is the fairest, all-round method of financing schools. It can be used under either a public or a private system. The same Legislators will vote the distribution.
17. Q. In the event of abolition, is there danger that the federal government might set up a federal system of schools?
- A. Such is not likely to occur. It would require a favorable vote of both Houses of the National Congress. Thus far, Congress has not voted on the segregation issue - not even for the District of Columbia, which Congress governs. Our Southern Congressmen have had the support of many from Northern, Eastern and Western states in preventing a vote on this matter.
18. Q. WHAT IS CONSIDERED THE BEST MEANS OF CONTINUING SEGREGATED PUBLIC SCHOOLS?
- A. A STATEWIDE SCHOOL BUILDING PROGRAM WHICH WOULD PROVIDE ADEQUATE FACILITIES.
19. Q. What would be the cost of an adequate school building program?
- A. The most recently completed study indicates that a program for the equalization of building facilities will cost approximately \$120,000,000.00, figured at \$7.50 per square foot.
20. Q. Is there any assurance that such a building program can be provided - will the proponents of the amendment support a building program?
- A. Yes. Proponents of the Amendment, including finance leaders of both Houses have committed themselves to adequate buildings for Negroes and Whites. They are anxious to maintain segregation. They believe a building program is necessary. WE MUST HAVE FAITH.
21. Q. Has the Legal Educational Advisory Committee taken a position regarding an adequate building program?
- A. Yes! By unanimous vote, on October 12, the Legal Educational Advisory Committee approved a recommended building program based on Senate Bill 1204. (See copy of report attached).
22. Q. In case abolition is eventually necessary, what will happen to vocational education and the school lunch program?
- A. If Mississippi's legal talent finds a successful method for maintaining segregation within the limits of the U. S. Supreme Court's decision, that same legal talent will be competent to find a way for the continued preservation of vocational education and the school lunch program.
23. Q. Can retirement benefits for teachers, free textbooks and school transportation be continued under a private school system?
- A. Yes. If private schools should be operated on a non-profit basis, teachers would be covered by social security. The Legislature can continue retirement benefits, free textbooks and transportation.